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Homœopathy and the Public Health.



*AN ADDRESS ON HOMOEOPATHY AND THE
PUBLIC HEALTH.*

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The public health is the counterpart of the commonwealth. That a system of medicine which has sustained itself independently and grown in a compound ratio for a hundred years; which has its own literature and its schools, its clinics, societies and hospitals, as well as its pupils and practitioners in every civilized community, is closely related to the health of the people is self-evident. To doubt this proposition would be like questioning whether protestantism is related to Christianity, charity to benevolence, or the sunlight to the evolution of plants and flowers. If its recognition were commensurate with its deserts, and if its representatives had not been the victims of a class-bias that so far as possible has excluded them from the army and the navy, the hospitals and the eleemosynary institutions of this and of other lands, I should have a more grateful theme, and a better prospect of pleasing you in what I have to say on this occasion.

Toleration has been defined as "the dogma of the weaker party." If the reformer did not insist upon it he would never have a hearing. When he comes to be tolerated within certain galling limits, he has already gained a foothold. From that time forward his success will depend upon the merits of his cause, his own and his comrades' tact and persistency, and the conduct of its followers when its claims have received the popular indorsement.

I shall speak upon this latter point, for the "incomputable perils of success," as Lowell styles them, are not the least among those which beset our school of medicine at the present time. Our cause was a good one; there was need for a change in the harsh and harmful methods of treatment that were in vogue in Hahnemann's time. He was a man of science, as science went in those days, but what was infinitely more important, he was imbued with the spirit of scientific doubt. He saw the defects of the ancient system and set to work to remedy them. To gain a hearing he must be aggressive. He characterized certain therapeutical abuses in such a way that some of his



phrases fit and stick like the nicknames that school boys give each other. He had the faith and firmness which are moral weapons of an invincible sort. With a just and benevolent cause he felt it no crime to be a dissenter from the established church in medicine. He knew that "while the animosities are mortal the humanities are eternal," and so, through a terrible opposition, he went forward in his chosen work. The merit of his cause is conceded and confirmed by thousands of physicians and by millions of patients in our day. If "the sweetest happiness that we ever know, the very wine of human life comes from sacrifice—from the effort to make others happy," what shall we not say for our hero, who, greater than Columbus, opened up a new world in therapeutics!

"Necessity," says Herder, "is the clock-weight that keeps all the wheels in motion." The early followers of Hahnemann were forced to be on the alert to defend their cause and at the same time to develop its resources. Its great qualities and small defects had to be looked after as one would take care of a legacy. It was a legacy, but not for an individual or even for a family. It was a bequest for the benefit of humanity at large, and for the public health and welfare. The abuse poured upon the early homeopathists, like that which was showered upon the early ovariotomists, is fast becoming ancient history. It is so much easier to accuse than to excuse them that the fashion is to revive the old bitterness whenever their methods or their writings are mentioned. We forget that, being placed on a frontier post of medical knowledge they must hold their ground and, if need be, fight in its defense. Beset by furious and unscrupulous critics they were forced to charge their ink with gunpowder. In those days the controversial papers and the professional intercourse of parties on both sides abounded in brotherly throat-cutting. Almost every doctor, regular, irregular and defective, insisted upon giving his neighbor "a piece of his mind," notwithstanding the fact that nobody had any peace of mind. Old doctors and medical students especially, looked at homeopathy through the prism of their own prejudices. The medical journals became like *Punch*, "a refuge for destitute wit," and almost every old-school medical society took up the contemptible business of running a partisan search-light for the detection and discipline of heretics.

Under these circumstances, when their belief had to be

kept up as a police force, it is no marvel that our brethren did and said some very unwise things. Like the lower brain centres that never sleep they had always to be vigilant, even at the expense of being sometimes vindictive. And some one has said that everybody has a little speck of fight underneath his peace and good will which he keeps for revolutions and great emergencies. In such a medical upheaval one must either fight for the supremacy of a faction or for a principle; and in this case it was not merely a matter of medical labels and liveries, but of deciding so important a question as the best means of relieving human suffering and of curing disease.

How well our predecessors did their work; what kind of fiber was in their faith, and how they defended it; how, as time went on, they were emancipated from controversy and left to cultivate their views and their peculiar resources; how the medical world, or the best part of it, has learned to treat them with a decent spirit of toleration that has finally soaked through the old rocks of prejudice, are matters of common knowledge in our day. As their antagonisms faded their resources were economized; as the radical and uncompromising spirit was torn down, the clinical quality took its place in their affections, their teachings, and their practice.

After the enthusiasm with which each discovery is received come the difficulties of application, doubts and reactions. It is a false philosophy which thinks more of methods than of results; as it is a spurious Christianity which puts a creed concerning the insoluble matters of faith above the mutual duties and interests of mankind.

I think it was Goethe who said that: "whatever emancipates our minds without giving us the mastery of ourselves is destructive." We are no longer engaged in an uncertain contest. Faith and works, and fighting and waiting have secured us a hearing, an opportunity, position and popularity. But there is the rub. Considering what the outcome of all sorts of antagonisms, moral and medical, has been; that those who gain power and influence almost always become intolerant and thereby cripple their cause and compromise their position; and considering that doctors are subject to the same infirmities as statesmen, soldiers and politicians; that in this instance, especially, the interests at stake are of vital consequence to the welfare of mankind, why should we not cultivate a larger

measure of professional toleration? Surely we are unfit for such an endowment, if we fail to appreciate the responsibility that it brings, or to make the best possible use of it toward keeping our place in the line of the liberal professions.

In the far away Northwest, they sometimes have hail-storms that thresh the grain in the field just before the harvest. There are some over-zealous disciples who act like a Dakota "twister" when it comes a few days too soon for the unlucky farmer. They have a passion for a label that amounts to an infirmity. Like a vulgar relation in good society, they invariably say the wrong thing at the wrong time; fancy that they are still living in a debatable and not in a progressive age; are always looking for the routes and resorts of an enemy; and cannot understand why the asperities of medicine should yield to the mellowing influence of time more rapidly than those of theology have done. You remember the old saying that "an honest man who lacks judgment is more dangerous than a thief who has discretion;" for so long as you watch the discreet wretch he cannot injure you, while there is no escape from the fool-friend.

In the glorious emergency in which we are placed there are duties that draw like the invisible chains of gravitation. These duties pertain to our fitness and qualification as physicians, and to our tolerance of those whose professional views and opinions differ from our own. The greatly improved facilities for obtaining a sound and thorough medical education are filling the first of these requirements in a most satisfactory manner; while the dissipation of the fog and mist of distance and Pharisaism among the fraternity is doing the rest.

It is true that in certain quarters we still are the victims of class-bias and of class-legislation. For there are those who continue to regard the representatives of the new school of practice with a muffled animosity against which our only shelter is the satisfaction of being in the right. But what concerns us, and those who believe with us, is of such exquisite importance and interest that, whatever the provocation, we cannot afford to quarrel with them any longer merely for the *theoretical* defense of our faith. We must use our own *clinical* spade, and we cannot answer for what will turn up. If some of the old roots of error, tradition, envy and unreason are thrown

out of the medical field altogether, so much the better for the coming doctors and their patients, for our literature, and for the general reputation of what used to be styled, and should really become, a *liberal* profession.

The position of homœopathy in our charitable institutions is not what it would have been but for the opposition that it has encountered from those who assume to monopolize all medical knowledge. Nor is it what it will become if we are fit and worthy for the places and the responsibilities that are rapidly falling into our hands as a simple matter of right and of justice.

From those who will follow me with special reports, you will have the detailed proof of this growing freedom of medical opinion. You will gather the most encouraging facts, showing that those who had dug a moat around our school of medicine to shut it in to itself, and to shut it off from all practical relation to the public health, have signally failed. The whole world of thought and action is permeated, but not saturated, with the principle of tolerance, and if we continue to watch and pray, to work and wait, a full share of recognition will yet be accorded to us. For it is a lucky thing that the universal law of change can so modify our views of liberty and of justice that the right may finally triumph. The powers that be are a shifting quantity, and this is an age of progress.

The repression of thought and the stifling of medical investigation, except on certain prescribed lines, is an antiquated abuse against which the spirit of this age is in open revolt. There is no toleration in the holding of those who differ from us in contempt; but there is an undercurrent of sympathy with what is new and noble, magnanimous and merciful of which we can take advantage. We have had a cycle, or better perhaps, a cyclone of that intellectual agitation which is the first step toward reform; and now, if our professional views are not twisted or too narrow; if we do not in turn become intolerant and egotistical; if we can learn to forget all but the ultimate end of our mission to mankind, and take advantage of the ripening harvest, there is no reason why all that is good and true in homœopathy should not be fully appreciated by the public at large as well as by the profession.

The three factors in the stupendous reform that homœopathy has wrought were its intrinsic and relative utility,

the faith and fidelity of its early apostles, and the persistent political intrigue of its opponents, which was the daily bread of the inquisition. It is enough to say that from the foundation of the world these are the precise conditions upon which every reform that was worthy of the name has depended for its evolution and establishment.

Although the persecution that we have suffered in times past has been a grievous burden, and has put us sometimes at a great disadvantage, it really has been a blessing in disguise. For while, as every Christian must know, the professional disabilities to which we have been subjected were indefensible at the bar of the Golden Rule, they were indispensable to our sturdy growth and development. The winds of opposition have rooted our tree of knowledge. Left to our own resources, we were compelled to do our best for our patients, and for our branch of the healing art at all points of the medical compass. Hence the all-around growth of our school, and the impossibility, except here and there, that we should become and remain mere fanciful and factional doctors.

Show us a form of quackery that can stand the clinical test of object lessons in all the practical branches of medicine and surgery, every day in the year, and before thousands of earnest and intelligent pupils and physicians; or one that has ever done first-class work in surgery, or in any of the various specialties. They have not even given the world that modern product of spontaneous generation, a decent gynæcologist!

But this Congress in which we are met comprises a host of representative men and women, who in many lands work as teachers, authors, and practitioners in every department of the medical calling; whose scientific attainments and professional probity, scope, popularity and usefulness are equal to those of a like number of physicians from any other school of practice. Judged by this standard and by the fruit of their labor, as it is preserved in our literature and noted by the Recording Angel, we surely do not deserve to be classed as outlaws and charlatans.

Twenty-three years ago and within a stone's throw of this spot, an address was made before our National Society which in the light of recent development reads like a prophecy. It sounded a clear note from the warm and loyal spirit of our dear departed friend, Dr. Carroll Dunham. *Liberty of medical opinion and action; a vital*

necessity and a great responsibility, was a theme that was worthy of the speaker and of his cause.

As the one man among us best fitted to appreciate the peculiar position in which we were about to be placed; whose love for humanity and for his own calling was boundless; whose loyalty could not be questioned; whose regard for the opinions of others was always respectful and generous, giving every one credit for the good that was in him; whose faith was firm and steady, not fickle and foolish; whose opinion was worth more than anybody's else argument; whose writings are neither fierce and feeble nor shallow and worthless, the text of that discourse reads like the Sermon on the Mount.

The time, then, is passed which called for defenses and expositions of Homœopathy, appeals for equal privileges and protests against oppression. We stand henceforth on equal ground as members of the great body of the medical profession, in which we shall take rank *according to the worth of our work in the broad field of medical science.*

After a clear statement of his individual position on points of doctrine that were mooted then, are now, and always will be, he says:

Notwithstanding this belief, I advocate entire liberty of opinion and practice. Nay, *because* of this belief, I plead for liberty; for I am sure that perfect liberty will the sooner bring knowledge of the truth and that purity of practice which we all desire.

So long as we are a body of physicians characterized by a distinctive name derived from the law of cure which we profess, I suppose that none will seek membership in the Institute, who do not substantially accept the law. This granted, I would have no exclusive creed, no restrictions relating to theory and practice, but would receive into membership of the Institute every applicant of suitable educational and moral standing. I deprecate any attempt to regulate or prescribe the opinion and practice of members of our school for two principal reasons. We *cannot* do it if we *would*, and we *ought not* if we *could*.

We *cannot*. We are not a body claiming to possess infallibility. It belongs not to us to utter denunciations of what we may believe to be errors of faith and practice; nor to put forth an index of the allowed and the forbidden. We are a voluntary association of laborers; simply from the love of knowledge, as is the case with all workers in science; and we have no power to enforce any restrictions upon which we might determine.

We *ought not*. Not until we have reached the absolute truth should we be justified in establishing a standard of

faith and practice. How far we are from that position need not be argued here. Let us remember the wise course of the Bureau of Direction of the Paris Hospitals, when, in 1850, Tessier, of Ste. Marguerite, made known his conversion to Homœopathy, and it was proposed to deprive him, on that account, of his position as hospital physician. The wise Chomel opposed the proposition, saying that every physician, who is thoroughly qualified to practice, has the right to select his own mode of treatment, and to judge what is best for his patients, and may not be interfered with, unless his results are notoriously bad or he commit some act of unquestionable malpractice. "For," said he, "it is only by the exercise of this freedom that changes and improvements have ever been introduced in practice; and herein lies the only hope of further improvements. Tessier, in practicing Homœopathy, has only exercised the same freedom of selection which Bouillaud and Rayer and Louis and I have enjoyed, and as his results are as good as ours, we may not interfere with him." * * *

Do we demand liberty of opinion? Then must we take care that our opinions rest on a foundation of study and acquirements which embraces the entire circuit of medical knowledge, and takes in and honestly estimates every new contribution to it, no prejudice of place or person giving a bias to our reason. Then must we act in the spirit of Hahnemann's noble admonition: "In a science in which the welfare of mankind is concerned, any neglect to make ourselves masters of it becomes a crime." * *

But, touching the open questions of medical opinion and practice—while each of us earnestly proclaims the opinions he has espoused, and zealously puts them in practice, let us cultivate the catholic and noble spirit of Chillingworth: "I will take no man's liberty of judgment from him, nor shall any man take mine from me. I will think no man the worse man, * * * I will love no man the less for differing in opinion from me, and what measure I meet to others I expect from them again."

In the light of his leadership and wise counsel; in the light of what we have learned since he left this precious legacy; and because of the great and growing influence of our branch of the Healing Art, I plead for toleration; for increased breadth of culture and acquirement; for the careful fostering of the specialties; and for the thorough and adequate fitness of our physicians for their all-around duties and responsibilities. These are the industrial conditions of success and stability; and if properly and persistently applied, they will surely demonstrate the vital relation that exists between Homœopathy and the Public Health.

